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Operational activities for development

Joint Inspection Unit

Economic and Social Council
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Item 3 of the agenda
Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the national execution of technical cooperation projects

Note by the Secretary-General

Corrigendum

Document E/2009/103, dated 26 June 2009, should bear the symbol A/64/375-E/2009/103.

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Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the national execution of technical cooperation projects

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, for the consideration of the General Assembly, his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "National execution of technical cooperation projects" (JIU/REP/2008/4).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "National execution of technical cooperation projects" (JIU/REP/2008/4) identifies and disseminates lessons learned and best practices in the implementation of national execution projects and programmes, including related issues of auditing, monitoring and evaluation.

The current report presents the views of United Nations system organizations on the recommendations provided in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit. The views of the system have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). CEB members welcomed this comprehensive report, which provides a thorough analysis of the issues and challenges concerning national execution programmes and projects, and expressed overall agreement with the recommendations.

I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "National execution of technical cooperation projects" (JIU/REP/2008/4) identifies and disseminates lessons learned and best practices in the implementation of national execution projects and programmes, including related issues of auditing, monitoring and evaluation. In its report, the Unit reviewed the background associated with national execution as a mechanism for project implementation, and analysed the planning, design and implementation of these types of projects. The report includes a review of the challenges organizations face when implementing national execution projects, and the obstacles the United Nations system confronts when trying to harmonize the implementation of these types of programmes.

II. General comments

2. CEB members welcome this comprehensive report, which provides a thorough analysis of the issues and challenges concerning national execution programmes and projects, and express overall agreement with its recommendations.

3. Organizations note, however, that the report occasionally conveys the impression that the national execution modality is equally valid for the specialized agencies, their related organizations, and the funds and programmes, and point out that the operating model of specialized agencies and related organizations stems from the specificity of their respective mandates. Although their projects are demand-driven, based on recipient country needs, as are national execution projects, the inputs necessary to produce expected results may not be readily available or available for procurement in-country, necessitating a different modality for implementation. Additionally, numerous projects are undertaken by specialized agencies and related organizations at other than the national level (i.e., regional, interregional or global) and therefore do not lend themselves to the national execution modality. Organizations stress that this should not be perceived as negative, but rather as an attribute that organizations take into account when making programme delivery decisions.

4. In general, organizations believe this report provides an excellent starting point for further analysis and evaluation of the costs and risks associated with adopting the national execution modality, especially for the specialized agencies and related organizations.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

JIU recommendation 1

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination should clarify the definitions governing national execution (NEX) and share it with all executive heads of the United Nations system organizations and other NEX-implementing partners.

5. CEB members concur with this recommendation and agree that there is confusion over the definition of "NEX" (the "narrow" definition found in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2007 (A/62/34/Add.1) or the "broader" one found in General Assembly resolution 62/208. They support efforts to clarify these terms, as

well as the terms "implementation" and "execution". They further consider that, in view of the increasing importance of the harmonized approach to cash transfer modality, it might also be useful to clearly define the latter term and distinguish national execution from harmonized approach to cash transfer.

JIU recommendation 2

The General Assembly, in the context of the triennial comprehensive policy review, to be held at its sixty-fifth session, should on the basis of a report to be submitted by the Secretary-General, invite the Chief Executives Board for Coordination to coordinate the compliance of the provisions of its resolutions, including resolution 62/208, which adopted national execution as the norm in the implementation of operational activities.

6. Organizations of the United Nations system support this recommendation.

JIU recommendation 3

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, as members of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should urgently harmonize National Execution (NEX) guidelines through the High-Level Committee on Management, the High-level Committee on Programmes and the United Nations Development Group so that those guidelines may be applicable to all NEX implementing partners, within the system-wide coherence framework and the initiative of United Nations Delivering as One.

7. CEB members support this recommendation.

JIU recommendation 4

The General Assembly and legislative bodies of corresponding organizations should reiterate that the donors provide less conditioned extrabudgetary contributions, including those financing National Execution (NEX), with a view to realizing the priorities of the recipient countries; and ensuring more flexibility, predictability and geographic balance in NEX expenditures.

8. CEB members support this recommendation and further suggest that the General Assembly and other legislative bodies encourage not only "less conditioned" contributions, but also unconditional contributions. Some organizations note that they accept conditioned or tied contributions only with language indicating that their financial regulations and rules may override any conditions that are inconsistent with them (such as limitations on worldwide procurement).

JIU recommendation 5

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should assist recipient Governments in strengthening their capacity development and capacity assessment; thus enabling them to use civil society, including NGOs as implementing partners, as appropriate.

9. While CEB members accept this recommendation, they note that many projects already target the strengthening of the capacity of recipient Governments in ways that will facilitate the use of the national execution modality in future projects.

JIU recommendation 6

The General Assembly, in the context of its triennial comprehensive policy review to be held at its sixty-fifth session, and legislative bodies of corresponding organizations should assist recipient Governments in strengthening their capacity in the accounting and audit field, through focused training, as required, to enable them to match the international standards.

10. Organizations of the United Nations system support this recommendation, but note that this may require a comprehensive programme, including training and other activities (e.g., support for policy and legislative frameworks to build the capacity of public institutions).

JIU recommendation 7

The General Assembly, in its deliberations on the triennial comprehensive policy review to be held at its sixty-fifth session, should consider the integration of more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of national execution in country programmes, in particular the Country Programme Action Plan, as appropriate, under the overall leadership of the recipient Government with the assistance of the United Nations system organizations, as required.

11. CEB members support this recommendation.

JIU recommendation 8

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should give priority to strengthening national evaluation capacities in recipient countries and establish a follow-up process for National Execution evaluation reports in order to ascertain the implementation of the findings and recommendations contained in the evaluation reports.

12. CEB members support this recommendation and note that they already apply the same monitoring and evaluation quality standards as those applied to other projects.

JIU recommendation 9

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should submit proposals to their legislative bodies to further simplify and harmonize the rules and procedures governing National Execution through the Chief Executives Board for Coordination to ensure coherence among the United Nations system organizations at the headquarters and field levels.

13. CEB members support this recommendation.

JIU recommendation 10

The General Assembly, in the context of its next triennial comprehensive policy review, to be held at its sixty-fifth session, and the Economic and Social Council should request the United Nations system organizations to strengthen the coordination with the United Nations regional commissions in the planning, implementation and follow-up to nationally executed projects through the Resident Coordinator system and the Regional Coordination Mechanism, to include the regional perspective and establish synergies between the regional, subregional and national programmes, particularly addressing cross-border projects.

14. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome this recommendation regarding the important role of the regional commissions and the Regional Coordination Mechanism to ensure system-wide coherence and the promotion of national execution.

JIU recommendation 11

The executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should share and disseminate lessons learned and best practices of National Execution (NEX) programmes and projects to all the United Nations system organizations within the framework of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, in particular the United Nations Development Group with the view to improving NEX implementation and practices.

15. CEB members support this recommendation.